

## SAVE WITH SUSPENSION FENCES

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It's possible to cut fencing costs about one-third to one-half by using suspension fences. Fence building is laborious and expensive, but suspension fences tested at the Texas Experimental Ranch, Throckmorton and on commercial beef cattle ranches have proven that total costs can be reduced greatly. A suspension fence is similar to other fences, except the distance between line posts is from 80 to 120 feet.

Suspension fences have these advantages over standard-type fences: useful for boundary, interior and cross-fencing; turn cattle equally well or better; last as long; require less upkeep; and work well in all cattle grazing areas.

The suspension fence sways in the wind and when animals run into it. This swaying motion actually repels (or scares, spooks) animals. There is little chance of cattle becoming mixed between pastures. Fences need less repair when herd bulls in adjoining pastures run over them during fights, since they spring back to normal position. The swinging motion discourages fighting through the fence.

### Construction

Anchor the suspension fence securely on each end with large posts, braces and a "deadman." Space line posts 80 to 120 feet apart. Place large support or stretch posts every  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile along the fence to make it more sturdy. Use sturdy support posts when the fence direction changes up or downhill. In sandy soils, stretch posts may have to be spaced  $\frac{1}{5}$  mile apart.

Line posts can be cedar, pressure-treated pine or steel and set at least 2 feet deep. Wooden posts

should be a minimum of  $6\frac{1}{2}$  feet tall with a 4-inch diameter top. A  $6\frac{1}{2}$ -foot steel post with anchor plates and wire slips is sufficient. Use longer and larger posts in sandy soils and set the posts deeper.

The suspension fence usually consists of four to six strands of  $12\frac{1}{2}$  gauge barbed wire. Each strand is stretched taut so that not more than a 3-inch sag exists between posts. Separate wire strands with spiral wire stays placed 16 feet apart. Do not let the lower ends of the stays touch the ground, since this defeats the swaying feature of the fence. Use wire stays 36, 42 or 48 inches long, depending upon the height of the top wire.

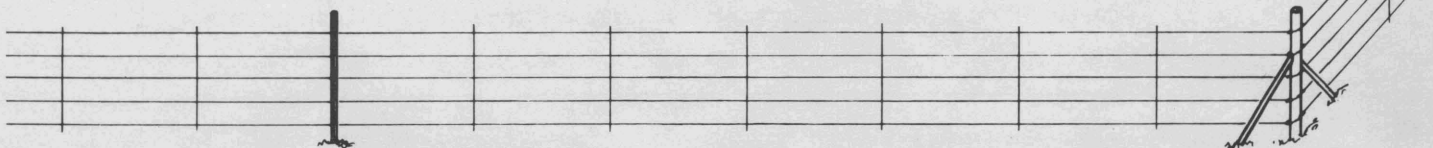
Anchor corner posts with a "deadman" set at least 4 feet deep or any other type anchorage that will hold firmly under your soil conditions. Corner braces and support posts should be at least 8 feet long with an 8-inch diameter top.

Fasten wire strands to wooden posts with long U-shaped staples, L-shaped deformed shank staples or a piece of 18-20 gauge metal strip or gripper  $\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ", placed over the wires at a slight angle and held with a 6-penny nail on each end. Metal grippers must be custom made. The L-shaped deformed shank staples have more holding power than the conventional staples on wooden posts. Fasten staples or metal grippers so that the wire can move back and forth against the post. Fasten wire strands to steel posts by attaching wire slips.

### Construction Cost

Building a mile of suspension fence with wooden posts and stays placed 16 feet apart costs about one-third as much as a conventional fence. Supplies needed are: 16 rolls wire, 53 line posts, corner and stretch posts, 330 spiral wire stays, metal strips, nails, bracewire, etc., and 108 hours of labor.

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### **Points to Consider When Purchasing Fencing Material**

#### **Wire**

Foreign-made wire may be slightly cheaper than domestic wire. Generally the workability, quality and uniformity of domestic wire is superior to foreign wire.

#### **Posts**

Cedar posts should contain at least two-thirds the diameter in dark-colored heartwood to have a life of 15 to 25 years. Cedar posts with a smaller amount of heartwood may not last more than 5 years.

Pine posts, properly pressure-treated with preservatives, should have a useful life of 30 years or more and are resistant to fire damage.

Steel posts are the most expensive, but they can be set faster and resist fire. Usually, they have a shorter useful life than pressure-treated pine posts or high-grade cedar posts, particularly in the higher rainfall areas of Texas.

The useful life of a fence generally is shorter in East Texas and along the Gulf Coast than in West Texas because higher humidity encourages rust and corrosion.

### **Semi-suspension Fence**

An adaptation of the suspension fence is the semi-suspension fence. This type of fence has line posts spaced 50 feet apart. It has proved successful for cross-fencing on several Texas ranches.

### **Where to Use Suspension Fences**

Fencing large pastures is necessary to establish and carry out systematic, deferred rotation grazing

programs for fast range improvement and sustained livestock production.

Use suspension fences for cross-fencing when subdividing large pastures for a systematic deferred rotation grazing program. Place cross fences according to range sites to insure proper forage plant utilization, proper distribution of livestock and ease in moving livestock at the end of deferment periods.

Suspension fences have proven satisfactory on many Texas ranches and this type fence could fit into your ranching operation.

### **Safety in Fencing**

Those who build and repair fences can sustain serious cuts and skin tears if they are not careful. These injuries are ragged, difficult to heal and frequently result in infection. Most injuries can be prevented by using the following precautions:

1. Wear close-fitting, tough clothes that will not catch on the wire.
2. Wear extra heavy, gauntlet-type leather gloves which fit snugly.
3. Wear high-top boots for maximum protection to ankles and legs.
4. Keep chains and wire-stretching clamps in good condition and attach them properly.
5. Stand on the side of the post opposite the wire when stretching the wire.
6. Use a nail apron to carry staples.
7. Place shields on power shanks when using a power hole digger or post driver.
8. Wear a protective helmet when operating a power post driver.
9. Use the correct driving caps on the post as recommended by the driver manufacturer.
10. Keep children away from fencing operations.
11. Avoid letting hands or gloves touch the face, eyes, neck and other exposed skin when handling treated wooden posts. The preservatives can be irritating on hot, windy days.

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